

**Following report was unanimously endorsed  
by the Community Forest Advisory Board on March 12, 2003**

Date: March 10, 2003  
To: Community Forest Advisory Board (CFAB), Agenda of March 12, 2003  
From: Marty Poirier, Chair, Implementation Committee  
Subject: CFAB Implementation Committee Report

Implementation Committee's Recommendation to CFAB  
for CFAB to recommend to Rules Committee on subject of Watering Agreements

CFAB Recommendations:

1. City staff to work with CFAB to develop a standard Nonprofit/Resident Tree Watering Agreement for the nonprofit service providers to use when asking residents to water trees which are part of City-funded street tree plantings. The objectives of the new one-page agreement are to: motivate residents to water free trees in Community Partnership with the City of San Diego; address residents' most frequent concerns about street trees; educate residents about the many benefits of street trees; and inform them how often to water and how much to water newly planted trees.
2. Nonprofit service providers to use the amended Nonprofit/Resident Tree Watering Agreement for one year, after which CFAB will review whether the new agreement is a useful tool in obtaining signed tree watering agreements from residents.
3. If necessary after that review, to consider other options for tree watering agreements, including the possibility of one executed between the City of San Diego and the residents.

Background:

CFAB has found that when some areas are targeted as needing street trees, and the only requirement for a resident to receive a free street tree is to sign an agreement on the nonprofit service provider's letterhead to water the tree for three years, it can sometimes be very difficult to obtain these watering agreements.

There are currently two types of watering agreements, and there has been difficulty obtaining residents' signatures on both types:

- 1) One-page agreement indicating the signer has read and understood two additional pages of information. The one-page says that the signer agrees to: check the water needs of the tree each week for three years and water accordingly; keep the tree well free from leaves, debris and weeds; and maintain the stakes and ties until they are removed.
- 2) ¾-page agreement in which the signer agrees, in return for receiving a free tree, to water the tree for three years according to the watering schedule provided.

The most common reasons residents give for being unwilling to sign watering agreements for free trees to be planted in the parkway are:

- 1) Residents do not like street trees because of past negative experience, or knowing people with past negative experience, where a tree either damaged a sidewalk, or dropped sap, leaves or needles on a sidewalk, yard, driveway or vehicle. No amount of persuasion by the service providers about the City having learned how to “plant the right tree in the right place” seems to convince people with these views to accept a free street tree and water it.
- 2) Residents are renting houses and either do not know if they will be there for three years, or do not want to be bothered watering a tree on property which is not their own. Sometimes, renters will refer the service providers to the property owner. Owners who respond negatively to free street trees do so for reasons listed in #1, above, or because they do not want to be responsible for watering a tree away from where they live.
- 3) Residents of apartments, and even managers of apartment complexes, do not feel they personally benefit from having a free tree planted in the parkway in front of the building, so they decline to sign a watering agreement.

CFAB is working to counter these reasons for unwillingness to sign watering agreements through education and outreach. The Board is working on mediums to educate people about the many appropriate and desirable tree species for the parkway, and the numerous benefits of trees, particularly energy conservation, more comfortable indoor and outdoor temperatures, and improved air and water quality. However, a change in attitude will not occur overnight.

Meanwhile, tree watering agreements still need to be signed by adjacent residents to ensure that free trees planted by the City in the parkway survive/thrive to provide the benefits listed above. The City is pleased to have a 90% success rate with tree plantings that include resident involvement. The Statewide average success rate for tree plantings is only 60%.

An important benefit of the tree watering agreements currently used by the nonprofit service providers is that they are not threatening for residents to sign. There is no indication that residents have concerns about signing an agreement with a nonprofit organization that is interested in planting trees, and the agreements do not cite consequences of failure to water a tree.

CFAB applauds the Community Partnership objective of a Tree Watering Agreement directly between the City of San Diego and the resident receiving the free street tree. However, CFAB believes that it is currently difficult enough to obtain Tree Watering Agreements without the agreements being official City documents. CFAB wishes to pursue improving the current Nonprofit/Resident Tree Watering Agreement in order to better motivate and educate residents to sign it, while retaining the non-threatening aspects of an agreement between a resident and a nonprofit service provider.